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“Ultra-Rich” Gianforte: Right Now Technologies’ Congressman

A Newspaper Column by Evan Barrett

May 1, 2017

What separates Greg Gianforte from the rest of us? Geography, issues and wealth.

Montana is large and diverse: 144,000 square miles, 56 counties, 537 unincorporated towns & communities, 130 incorporated cities and towns, and 118,405 businesses (3078 large; 115,326 small). At the same time, Montana has only 3 members of Congress to represent our wide social, economic and geographic diversity.

If Greg Gianforte is elected to Congress, for the first time in Montana’s 128-year history, 2 of our 3 Congress members would come from the same county, same city, same industry and even the same company. Gianforte and Senator Steve Daines are both from Gallatin County; both from Bozeman; both are wealthy; and both are entrepreneurs from the same business - Right Now Technologies – on essentially the same square mile of Montana. If that profile represents you, then vote for Gianforte to be Daines’ partner in DC. But if you’re looking for someone more representative of you, your family or your locality, either Rob Quist or Libertarian Mark Wicks is your choice.

I like Rob Quist with his Montana values, struggles and all. He’s “one of us” who’ve spent a lifetime surviving in the state we love. I like his stands on issues - there are many policy reasons to choose Rob Quist in this election.

Then there is Gianforte. His record of using the courts to restrict public access to the East Gallatin River and his overall attitude on public lands management turns me away. But there is much more that bothers me about the Bozeman multi-millionaire: his desire to defund Planned Parenthood and his overall attitude towards women’s Constitutional privacy and reproductive healthcare rights; his record of opposing legal protection from discrimination for Montanans; his propensity for tax breaks for the wealthy and inherent belief in disproven trickle-down economics; his religious-based science denial; his weak attitude toward people depending upon social security, demonstrated by his statement that “there’s nothing in the Bible that talks about retirement,” and Noah “wasn’t like, cashing Social Security checks,” and more.

Now to Gianforte’s wealth. The standard measurement of net worth from the Center for Responsive Politics puts Gianforte’s net worth at \$190 million, dwarfing virtually everyone in Congress where the average member’s net worth is just over a million. Gianforte would be the 5th wealthiest member of Congress, 171 times wealthier than the average Congressperson. In addition to that \$190 million, Gianforte has a \$134 million family foundation controlled by him, his wife and a son.

Gianforte’s enormous wealth raises disturbing representation issues. Gianforte told the press that his “cash in” on the Oracle sale was over \$300 million. While he has earned his money and is welcome to it, I do not believe that someone worth almost \$200 million

can understand the daily challenges that face average Montanans. That \$200 million doesn't just place Gianforte in the Top 1 Percent Club, he is in the 1 Percent Club's 1 Percent Club – the top 1/100th of 1% - classified as “ultra-rich.”

Remember just last year when he wrote a personal check for nearly \$6 million to buy tens of thousands of TV ads to try to persuade you he was a regular guy who should be Governor. Now he is buying ad after ad to bash his opponent and tell you he can go to Washington DC and “drain the swamp” of big money influence in our national affairs. Now that's audacious!

Gianforte's official financial disclosure form shows annual “unearned income” of \$8+ million a year. In addition, he got nearly \$500 thousand in the past year just for being a board member of a California company. How does this compare to the rest of Montana? It would take the average Montana worker 222 years of working to equal what Gianforte earns in one year, mostly without actually working.

Given his immense wealth, whose interests do you think Gianforte will represent back in the DC swamp? Yours? Or will he help continue to tilt the economic playing field toward people like himself?

Think about the geography – two in Congress from one square mile, the effect of Gianforte's “ultra-rich” status, and his positions on the issues. Then vote in your own best interests.

Evan Barrett, who lives in historic Uptown Butte, recently retired after 47 years at the top level of Montana economic development, government, politics and education. He is an award-winning producer of Montana history films who continues to write columns and record commentaries, and occasionally teach Montana history.

(700 words in the body)

I have done lots of research to back everything in the column ... it is available ... all statements backed by the research ... the “Ultra-Rich” and “top 1/100th of 1%” come from:

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-04-03/top-tenth-of-1-percenters-reaps-all-the-riches>